



Alternate Plans For Family Forests

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Site-specific management
opportunities



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources



Contents

Overview.....	2
Frequently Asked Questions.....	3
How to Apply	8
DNR Region Offices.....	9

Alternate plans allow landowners to achieve more management flexibility in certain situations than is allowed by the Forest Practices Rules. Here are some situations where an alternate plan may be useful. Please contact your local Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Small Forest Landowner Forester for more information.



Riparian Hardwood
Management



Obstruction in the core zone



Overstocked stand



Forest Health



Smaller or Seasonal
streams

Others:

- Individual and group tree selection;
- Reverse in slope away from a riparian management zone;
- Conversion to historical stocking density and tree species.

Note: The information in this handout is updated on a regular basis to stay current with program changes. For the most current version, please contact the Small Forest Landowner Office or visit our website at: www.dnr.wa.gov/sflo



DNR Foresters can help landowners develop site specific forest management options.

Overview

Washington's Forest Practices Rules have allowed landowners to develop alternate plans since the early 1980's. Alternate plans are intended to provide landowners with a means to develop site-specific management plans for all timber activities regulated under state Forest Practices Rules. An alternate plan may alter the prescriptions outlined in the Rules as long as the plan provides protection to public resources at least equal in overall effectiveness to the protections the regular Rules would provide.

Appendix H, subsection H.2(a)(i) of the 1999 Forests and Fish Report states, "*A landowner may propose, through an alternate plan, a site [specific] management strategy different from the basic rules that implement this Report, provided that when judged in its totality, the alternate plan must provide protection for public resources at least equal in overall effectiveness to the protection provided by the basic rules. If approved, the prescriptions in the alternate plan would be substituted for the prescriptions in the corresponding basic rules.*"

In 1999, when the new Forests and Fish Forest Practices Rules were being negotiated, additional alternate plan guidelines (WAC 222-12-040*) were developed to provide more flexibility to small forest landowners with the new riparian buffer regulations. The use of an alternate plan is not limited to riparian areas, however, and landowners may propose alternate management strategies for any forestry operation that is regulated by the state Forest Practices Rules.

A landowner submits an alternate plan as part of a forest practices application for timber harvest to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) region office that services the area where their forestland is located. Small forest landowners can request assistance from DNR with developing their plan. The plan must describe how the proposed alternative management options depart from the state Forest Practices Rules and how the proposal will provide sufficient resource protection. An application with an alternate plan may be submitted for either a two-year or a multi-year (5-year limit) period of time. Landowners may submit alternate plans as part of a single forest practices application or multiple applications if all harvest units covered by the applications have similar geographical and environmental characteristics.

**All Washington Administrative Codes (WAC's) governing forest management may be obtained from the DNR using the contact information at the back of this handout.*



An alternate plan can provide a landowner greater flexibility in how a forest can be managed than is currently allowed under the standard Forest Practices Rules.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is an Alternate Plan?

An alternate plan is a site-specific management plan written by a landowner that proposes different management strategies than what is allowed under current state Forest Practices Rules. An alternate plan may provide a landowner greater flexibility in how a forest can be managed, as long as the plan provide riparian functions that maintain healthy riparian and aquatic ecosystems.

When may an Alternate Plan be submitted?

Landowners may submit an alternate plan to DNR for review at any time. Landowners should first contact DNR's Small Forest Landowner Office to request an alternate plan proposal form. The proposal form provides an outline that landowners can use to complete a plan. The completed plan is then submitted with a forest practices application when the landowner is planning to conduct a timber harvest. However, landowners are encouraged to submit a *draft* of their alternate plan to their region Small Forest Landowner Forester *prior* to submitting it with the forest practices application. This will give the Small Forest Landowner forester time to review the plan and make any recommendations before the plan is formally submitted to DNR and before the official time period for review begins.

How long is an Alternate Plan good for?

The alternate plan and accompanying forest practices application are valid for two to five years. An alternate plan may be part of a single forest practices application or multiple applications. Once the forest management activities have been completed, or when the forest practices application expires, the alternate plan will expire. A new alternate plan must be submitted with a new forest practices application covering future harvest and management activities.

Are there any costs associated with an Alternate Plan?

The standard forest practices application fees apply to an application with an alternate plan. There are no additional fees for submitting an alternate plan with a forest practices application. The alternate planning process will, however, require significant effort and input from the landowner. DNR Small Forest Landowner Foresters are available to assist landowners in developing an alternate plan. A landowner may also choose to hire a consulting forester to assist in the preparation of an alternate plan. This assistance may include laying out a harvest unit, defining specific management strategies, identifying which Forest Practices Rules will be replaced, and suggestions for plan writing.

Where can I find more information on Alternate Plans?

Alternate plans are described in the state Forest Practices Rules under WAC 222-12-040. A landowner can also visit the Small Forest Landowner Office website (www.dnr.wa.gov/sflo) for more information, or call their region DNR office to speak with a Small Forest Landowner forester.

Alternate Plans



An alternate plan may include habitat enhancement projects such as large woody debris placement.

What are some situations where an Alternate Plan may be useful?

The following site-specific situations are commonly found on small-forested landholdings. Other situations not mentioned here may also be appropriate for an alternate plan. Please ask your region's Small Forest Landowner forester for more details.

1. Over-stocked stand management.
2. Riparian hardwood management.
3. Individual tree and/or group selection.
4. Obstructions in the core zone (roads, power lines, railroads, etc.).
5. Reverse in slope away from a fish bearing drainage within the riparian management zone on either side of a stream.
6. Stocking density and species composition incompatible with historic conditions.
7. Forest health, which can include insect, disease, fuel loading, etc.
8. Intermittent, low gradient fish habitat, or potential fish habitat streams.

What information should be in an Alternate Plan?

Alternate plan proposals must include all of the following elements:

1. A map scaled to the size of the management unit showing the location of all affected streams, wetlands and other water bodies, unstable slopes, existing roads and roads proposed for construction, timber harvest units and other forest practices activities;
2. A written description of the site's environmental conditions. This should include: physical stream channel characteristics and in-stream fish habitat conditions; the health, age and structural conditions of the forest stand; geographic and/or other general factors that affect the site and are relevant to the management practices proposed by the alternate plan;
3. A description of how the alternate plan provides public resource protection. This should include a description of the proposed alternate management and enhancement strategies;
4. A list of all Forest Practices Rules that the alternate plan deviates from;
5. When applicable, a description of the landowner's proposed implementation schedule and monitoring and adaptive management strategies; and
6. When one alternate plan is submitted for multiple harvest units covered by multiple forest practices applications, the landowner must show that all sites included in the alternate plan share sufficient common characteristics to be considered together.

How soon will an Alternate Plan be approved after it is submitted?

Forest practices applications submitted with a complete alternate plan will be approved or disapproved within:

1. 30 days of DNR's receipt of the plan and a two-year forest practices application, or
2. 45 days of DNR's receipt of the plan and a multi-year (five-year limit) application.

Alternate Plans



In many cases an ID Team will visit the site of an alternate plan to assess the potential impacts to public resources.

How does the Interdisciplinary Team and review process work?

Upon receiving a request to prepare an alternate plan, DNR will assemble state, federal and tribal resource professionals to form an Interdisciplinary (ID) Team. Other participants of this team can include the landowner and/or his or her representative, a DNR Small Forest Landowner Forester and a DNR Forest Practices Forester. The DNR Forest Practices forester will lead the ID Team meeting.

The ID Team will conduct a site visit to help determine whether the management options outlined in the alternate plan provide adequate protection to public resources. The ID Team works with the landowner to reach consensus on the efficacy of the plan. The ID Team will provide their collective professional opinion to the DNR Forest Practices Forester leading the meeting, who will then make the determination whether or not to approve the application. In some cases the ID Team may approve some aspects of the plan and may recommend revisions to other parts of the plan.

Will an Alternate Plan allow me to cut more timber in the riparian management zone than the standard rules allow?

A landowner can write an alternate plan that includes management activities having a greater level of harvest in a riparian zone than is normally allowed under the standard Forest Practices Rules. However, alternate plan strategies must describe how the activities will provide sufficient ecological functions within a riparian zone. Essential riparian zone functions include: shade, sediment trapping, large woody debris and leaf litter fall, stream bank stabilization and other riparian features that are important to the health of both riparian forests and aquatic systems. Habitat enhancement activities may be accomplished through the alternate plan process. Enhancement activities may include: placing of large woody debris, creating snags, planting trees and shrubs, and sowing grass seed for erosion control.

Can my Alternate Plan be disapproved?

The primary objective of an alternate plan is to create management options that provide protection to public resources at least equal in overall effectiveness to the standard Forest Practices Act and Rules. If the ID Team determines that the management options developed by the landowner are not as effective as the Forest Practices Rules in providing protection to natural resources, the alternate plan will either be disapproved in whole or in part, or conditions may apply. DNR will provide the reasons why all or part of the alternate plan has been disapproved. A landowner may then have the opportunity to amend their alternate plan within the application review period.

When my Forest Practices Application and Alternate Plan have been submitted, may I withdraw my Alternate Plan for any reason?

A landowner can withdraw their alternate plan at any time prior to beginning the management activities included in the alternate plan and forest practices application. If a landowner decides to withdraw an alternate plan, their harvest unit will then be subject to the current Forest Practices Rules.

Alternate Plans



Landowners are encouraged to work in cooperation with DNR in the development of an alternate plan monitoring process.

May I submit an Alternate Plan for multiple, non-contiguous harvest units?

Alternate plans may be part of a single forest practices application or multiple applications if the sites included in the plan have sufficient common physical characteristics to justify being considered together. Common physical characteristics may include: overstocked stands, hardwood dominated stands, individual trees or groups that should be removed (due to fire risk, forest health, or other reasons), obstructions in the core zone (i.e. roads, power lines, etc.), a streamside geography where the slope reverses to a non-fish bearing drainage within the riparian management zone on either side of a stream, or where historical stocking density and tree species are more desirable than current conditions. There may be other commonalities between non-contiguous sites that could justify a single alternate plan as part of forest practice applications for more than one site. Please contact your region's Small Forest Landowner forester if you have similar situations between two or more harvest units that were not mentioned above.

May I write an Alternate Plan for my property, then enroll the trees remaining in the riparian zone in the Forestry Riparian Easement Program?

Yes. If a landowner develops an alternate plan for harvesting more timber than is currently allowed under the standard rules, and the plan is accepted by DNR, the timber remaining in the riparian area following harvest may then be eligible for compensation under the Forestry Riparian Easement Program. For more information on the Forestry Riparian Easement Program, please contact your local DNR Small Forest Landowner forester.

What can I do to improve the chance of my Alternate Plan being approved?

The most significant steps a landowner can take to improve the likelihood that their alternate plan will be approved is to provide justification how the management options they are proposing will either improve the ecological functions of the site or not adversely affect the functions of the site.

A landowner may also volunteer to either develop a monitoring plan or allow DNR to implement a monitoring plan to track the effects of the management activities conducted under the alternate plan. The monitoring plan should be comprehensive enough to adequately track long-term changes to the ecosystem.

Landowners are encouraged to submit a draft alternate plan to their region Small Forest Landowner Forester for review prior to submitting the forest practices application. This will give the forester time to assess the plan and give the landowner critical feedback on the sufficiency of the proposal. A forester's review will also help troubleshoot any potential problems with the plan that may delay the ID Team's review.

Alternate Plans



An overstocked stand in the riparian management zone is a common situation where an alternate plan can be used to improve forest conditions.

What are the principle steps involved in submitting and having an Alternate Plan reviewed?

1. The landowner contacts their regional small forest landowner forester for an alternate plan proposal form.
2. A landowner prepares a draft alternate plan and forest practices application and submits them together to their region's DNR office.
 - Before formally submitting this information to DNR, landowners are encouraged to talk with a DNR forester to ensure that the proposal is complete.
 - At any time prior to operation under an approved alternate plan, a landowner may elect to abandon his/her efforts to operate under the plan and may submit a revised forest practice application that follows standard Forest Practices Rules.
1. When DNR receives a completed forest practices application with a complete alternate plan, DNR will:
 - Appoint an ID Team and establish a deadline for completing a field review, and
 - Provide copies of the forest practices application and alternate plan to the Washington State Departments of Ecology and Fish and Wildlife, affected Indian Tribes, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Fisheries program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other parties that have expressed an interest in reviewing alternate plans. Other interested parties must have landowner approval to participate in the ID Team visit.
4. The ID Team conducts a site visit with the landowner.
5. The ID Team develops a written recommendation for approval, disapproval or alteration of the proposed plan.
6. DNR considers the ID Team's recommendation in deciding whether to approve the alternate plan as written, approve with conditions or disapprove the alternate plan. If DNR disapproves or conditions the application with an alternate plan, a written statement will be provided to the landowner explaining why the application was conditioned or denied.
7. When approved, implementation of the plan may proceed.
8. DNR conducts compliance checks.



A DNR forester can meet with a landowner to discuss the benefits of an alternate plan.

How to Apply

Application

To initiate the process, a landowner is encouraged to contact the Small Forest Landowner forester at the nearest DNR Region Office and request the alternate plan proposal form. The landowner is responsible for submitting an alternate plan, however, an alternate plan can be prepared by a professional consulting forester or any other individual the landowner designates.

An alternate plan is submitted with a forest practices application to the DNR region office serving the area where the forestland is located. For details on what kind of information should be included in an alternate plan, please refer to the question on page 4. “what information should be in an alternate plan”. Alternate plans may be submitted with either a two-year or a multi-year (5-year limit) forest practices application. Alternate plans may be submitted with a single forest practices application or multiple applications if all harvest units included in the applications have sufficient common characteristics to justify being considered under one alternate plan. Please see the “Frequently Asked Questions” section of this handout for other details.

Plan preparation

The landowner must present a clear description of the proposed management activities, the specific location(s) where the activities will be applied and which Forest Practices Rules will be replaced. An alternate plan must accurately describe the proposed alternate management strategies and harvest activities associated with the accompanying forest practices application.

The alternate plan must provide sufficient information so that DNR, through consultation with an ID Team, can determine whether the plan provides protection for public resources at least equal in overall effectiveness to the protection provided under the Forest Practices Rules. This information may include scientific literature justifying the silvicultural activities being proposed, a description of the historical ecological conditions of the area, the projections of forest stand or riparian modeling software programs, and/or reasons why voluntary enhancement efforts will improve riparian functions.

DNR’s Small Forest Landowner Office staff is available to help landowners with an alternate plan. The office can provide technical assistance in preparing an alternate plan and can facilitate small forest landowner interactions with the department, other state and federal agencies, affected Indian tribes and the ID Team. The Office can also provide a list of consulting foresters who can provide professional assistance with developing silvicultural management options and preparing an alternate plan.



For more information:

Please contact the Small Forest Landowner forester at the nearest DNR region office.

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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources
Doug Sutherland - Commissioner of Public Lands



Small Forest Landowner Office

The Department of Natural Resources Small Forest Landowner Office provides assistance to small forest landowner concerns and policies. With a mission to protect both the economic viability of small forest landowners and the natural resources on which they depend, the office promotes incentive-based approaches for improving the management of Washington's privately owned non-industrial forests. Recognizing the significant contribution small landowners make to the protection of Washington's forests and fish, the office will strive to equip landowners with all the necessary tools and information to help them keep their land in forestry use.

For more information on the Small Forest Landowner Office, please visit our website at: www.dnr.wa.gov/sflo